

Hiring fair or slave market?

By LEADER REPORTER

THEY WORKED for £10 a year, every day from dawn until dark, and the only day off they had was the day of the Barronstown Races.

It's at least 50 years since the last hiring fair was held in Kilmallock, but Mrs. Alice Flavin of Aldston House, Cre-cora, still recalls the sense of outrage she felt after coming from a film about the American slave trade, to hear of events that same day at the hiring fair.

"We had our own slave market," she said this week. Next day she cut out a picture of the fair in the *Limerick Leader* to keep for posterity.

"Yes I suppose you could call them the employment agencies of the past," said Mrs. Flavin.

Same tasks

Discrimination, it seems, was unheard of. Men and women worked at the same tasks, milking cows at dawn, sowing potatoes and feeding calves until darkness fell. All received the same wage.

The labourers had no union, but they always bargained for one day off – the day of the Barronstown Races.

Although her own family kept horses and employed only stable boys when she was young, Mrs. Flavin recalls seeing an entry in a wages book which showed that the family ploughman was paid 3/6 a week in 1912. Years later she met the same ploughman's wife and asked her: "In the name of God how did you exist on that?"

"We were millionaires then," replied the woman.